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## BREEDING OF THE BANDED STILT IN THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN GOLDFIELDS DURING 1986

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The few published records of breeding of the Banded Stilt, *Cladorhynchus leucocephala* indicate it nests in colonies on sandy islands or spits in large inland salt lakes, after they have filled in response to heavy rainfall. In the Goldfields region of Western Australia, breeding and attempted breeding have been recorded irregularly; records were summarised by Burbidge and Fuller (1982).

Intense rainfall throughout the Eastern Goldfields (Fig. 1) during June 1986 (Table 1) filled many saltlakes in the area, however stilt breeding was not detected until September 1986, when thousands of flightless chicks fled the receding waters. On 10 September, a flock of several hundred chicks trotted south through the town of Menzies before dispersing into bush or expiring along the roadside.

Subsequently, several visits were made to the area to locate breeding sites. Landholders in the area were also contacted in an endeavour to find breeding colonies. Many reported juvenile stilts at their dams, but none were sure of their origin.

Table 1: Rainfall (mm) from Stations around Lake Ballard, March-July 1986.

Station	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Yearly Total	Mean Yearly Rainfall
Jeedamya	5	2	8	102	22	197	218 (1925-1986)
Menzies Post Office	16	5	9	113	25	270	239 (1986-1985)
Riverina	19	8	14	101	27	246	260 (1964-1986)

On 11th September, a trip was made to the Menzies area. Flightless chicks in small groups were observed along the main road from 28 km south to 32 km north of Menzies. Only one adult bird was seen, accompanying a group

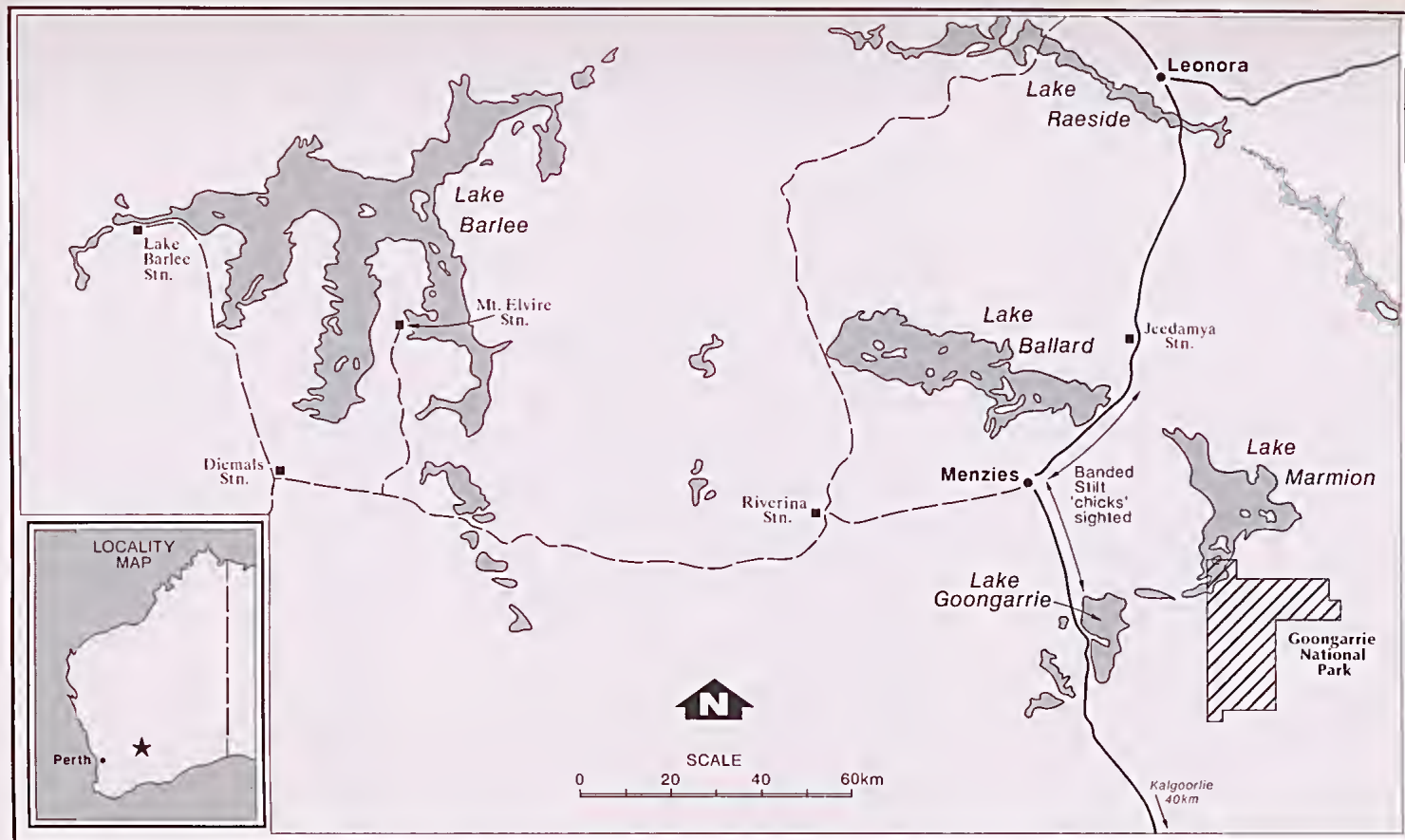


Figure 1: Saltlakes and Localities in the Menzies area.

of over one hundred chicks near Lake Ballard.

On 13th September, a visit was made to Lake Ballard. Many thousands of juvenile stilts of various ages were present in several expanses of shallow water. Groups of stilts were moving south-east, leaving the lake and striking across country through the surrounding bluebush shrubland. Two chicks picked up off the road, banded and released on the lake were recaptured only two hours later some 4 km east on the lake. The lake shore was littered with dead chicks and there was evidence of predation by foxes, which had waded out to islands through water up to 20 cm deep. Stilt chicks were also observed to be taken by Wedge-tailed Eagles (*Aquila audax*), Spotted Harriers (*Circus assimilis*) and an unidentified corvid.

On 17th September, a 2½ hour flight was made from Kalgoorlie over Lakes Goongarrie, Marmion and Ballard. Flocks of several hundred juvenile (but flighted) stilts were observed on vast shallow sheets of water in the south-eastern corner of Lake Goongarrie and in the centre of Lake Marmion. Large numbers of dead chicks were also visible at the western end of Lake Marmion.

No breeding sites in Lake Ballard were detected, although three seemingly suitable islands were noted for a later ground search. Nine islands were inspected on 18th September, along the south-eastern arm of the lake. No breeding colony was located, however several stilt eggs were found washed up on the island shores, indicating nesting had occurred within the lake.

By late September, the stilts had dispersed throughout the Goldfields. Hundreds were present on saltlakes around Kalgoorlie as well as freshwater bodies such as dams and sewerage ponds.

A comparison was made between rainfall data from pastoral stations in the Menzies area and known breeding records. This indicated that the incidence of suitable rainfall events to stimulate breeding was such that breeding in the area has probably been frequently overlooked.

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